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COUNTRY China (Sinkiang Province)

SUBJECT The Mongols of Sinkiang

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1. Number in Sinkiang: The Mongols of Sinkiang are also referred to, both in Sinkiang and in English-language texts on that province, as Meng, Ko-erh-k'o-tsu, Khalkha and Dsungars. They are also often referred to by their tribal name. The five Mongol tribes which are found in Sinkiang are the Chahar, Khoshot, Olot, Torgut and Urianghai. According to a 1941 survey the Mongols numbered 63,018 or slightly less than 1.69% of the total population of Sinkiang.

2. History of the Race: The Mongols of Sinkiang are still nomads, their customs and habits have not changed in a thousand years. They move constantly in search of fresh pastures, their lives being governed by rainfall and the change of season.

A vast sweep of nomad devastation, which won them the throne of China and carried their warfare as far west as the Danube, brought the Mongols to Sinkiang. What is now both Chinese and Russian Turkestan, once was subjugated by Jenghis Khan's Mongols in the thirteenth century. They came under the rule of Jagatai, second son of Jenghis Khan, and he and his successors remained in power for almost two centuries. But in 1368 the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty in China was overthrown by the House of Ming and soon afterwards Sinkiang also seceded from Mongol rule. Thus, temporarily, Mongol power seemed to have declined and differences between the peoples of Mongolia and those in northern Sinkiang (Western Mongols) began to develop.

The subordinate league of the Western Mongols was a tribe called the Olots (also called the Oirat Federation, the Mongolian written form being Ughelet), who in the fourteenth century migrated into Sinkiang from the Angara River.

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They soon came into military prominence in Sinkiang under a Khan by the name of Galdan. Galdan's nephew, Rabdan, gave the name Jon Gar (Dzungars, sometimes written Jungars, or Zungars and called Chun-ko-erh Pu by the Chinese), his branch of the Olots, to the kingdom when he succeeded to the Mongol possessions. The name has since stuck in geographies as Dzungaria and it has reference to that part of Sinkiang which lies between the Tien Shan range and the Altai Mountains, i.e., northern Sinkiang. These same Olots took advantage of political differences to the south of them and came to dominate southern Sinkiang, Tsinghai and Tibet for a brief historical period until 1566. This period has even been viewed by one Chinese historian as a "Golden Age" for the Western Regions. Yet the center of Olot power, for the Olots and for other Western Mongols, was Dzungaria and the steppes, not the oases of southern Sinkiang, where Uighur civilization appears to have persisted.

In 1650 the Dzungars of the Olot Federation attempted to conquer the rest of those who would not submit to them. A large number, including Torguts and Khoshots, fought their way westward through territory held by Turkic tribes until they reached the lower Volga, where they became known as Kalmuks, probably derived from a Turkic word which means "remnant".

Eighty years later the Manchus invaded Sinkiang and in 1756 defeated and almost annihilated the Dzungars, inviting those who had resisted the Dzungars to return. Some did, including the ancestors of most of the present Torguts of Sinkiang. The Chahars were, at that time, brought to Sinkiang from their old pastures around Kalgan (Wanchuan), in what is now Chahar Province of Inner Mongolia. As strangers who would not combine easily with the Western Mongols, they were strategically placed to command the main route between Urumchi (Tihua) and Kuldja (Ining). The Urianghai of Sinkiang are also not Western Mongols. As their name indicates, they are related to the tribes of the territory formerly called Urianghai, later changed to Tannu Tuva and eventually annexed by the Soviet Union. They originally spoke a Turkic language, becoming Mongolized only as late as the nineteenth century. All other Mongols in Sinkiang are Western Mongols. They are related, by their dialects and historical association, to tribes of the Mongolian People's Republic, Tsinghai, the northern side of Tibetan plateaus and to the Kalmuks of the lower Volga.

A number of indications point to the probability that the majority of Western Mongols are the descendants of tribes which originally were forest tribes and later moved into steppe country, where they became pastoral nomads. It has been demonstrated that the Mongols only ruled southern Sinkiang and did not occupy it as they did in northern Sinkiang (Dzungaria). Life in southern Sinkiang has been that of the isolated, petty agriculture of the oasis. The power of the nomadic Mongols is their mobility. The contrast in living conditions of the Mongol nomad and the Uighurs of Sinkiang is even today one of the noticeable differences between life in northern and southern Sinkiang.

Until the Chinese Revolution of 1911, the Mongol Princes had virtual autonomy in administering their tribal territories. Under the Republic, the Chinese authorities have upheld the power of the Princes over their subjects, but at the same time have steadily increased Chinese control over the Princes themselves. The result of this policy has been to make all Mongols antifeudal as well as anti-Chinese. Chinese policy in Sinkiang has also been to encourage friction between the Mongols and the other peoples. Under the long regime of Governor Yang Tseng-hsin, the Kazakhs were provided with arms and were permitted to drive a wedge of expansion into the Altai region in order to separate the Mongols of Sinkiang from their brethren over the border in the Mongolian People's Republic. On the other hand, the Torguts of Qara Shahr geographically separate from other Mongols and close to a region of Kazakh strength, were allowed to develop a well-equipped cavalry force trained by White Russian Cossacks who had left Siberia after the Soviet Revolution.

Today the Mongols of Sinkiang are represented by the Chahar, Khoshot, Olot, Torgut and Urianghai tribes. Of these the Torgut tribe is numerically the most important.

3. Religion: The Mongols are Lama Buddhists. Though their life is not much hindered by religious customs, those ceremonies which are prescribed by the Lamas, their priests, are observed with every reverence and there is a very genuine religious feeling shown in their prayers. It is the ambition of every family to have a son in the Lamaist priesthood, but much formality and expense are involved in the ritual. Celibacy is supposedly required of the Lamas. In accordance with this tradition, entrance to the Lama monasteries is usually forbidden to women, but on certain rare religious festivals each year women are said to be admitted. [redacted] 25X1 25X1

On the death of his parents an only son, who has become a Lama, is permitted to lay aside his priestly rank, for it is considered that it is important that he should marry and continue his father's name. But though the continuation of a family is considered of great importance, the Mongols never preserve a family tree. Though their memories extend back to the great-grandfather, there is no term in their language for any more remote ancestors than that, no one ever thinks of going back any further save in the case of great leaders.

4. Physical Characteristics: The facial characteristics of the Mongols are similar to those of the Chinese, but their cheek bones are slightly more emphasized and the slant of the eyes is more noticeable. They are, in most cases, much taller than the Chinese, calmer in speech and manner and can be readily identified by their general impassive characteristics. The Mongol men are extremely picturesque horsemen and their women have a stirring, "Wild West" attractiveness about their appearance even when performing household tasks such as preparing cheese, chopping wood, or milking.

5. Dress: The clothing worn by Mongol men is mostly dark in color. They wear long woolen gowns, short leather jackets and broad brimmed, cone-topped hats. In winter the men wear sheepskin robes, fur wind-hoods and over-sized knee boots. It is an excellent dress for cold weather on the plains and is imitated by many Chinese. The only touch of color in their everyday dress is the red button on top of the woolen cap; but ornaments of gold and silver are worn, mostly in the form of earrings or bracelets. Pearls and coral are much prized and gold rings are worn on the fingers to indicate wealth. All in all, they present a fascinating figure as they swagger about in their long gowns.

The Mongol women wear long, vari-colored skirts made of cotton fabric, the trains of which sweep the floor; brocaded blouses; wide saucer-shaped hats; and thick sturdy boots that are life-long items of apparel. Innumerable necklaces and bracelets of precious stones and long false braids are also part of their costume. They make their braids of horsehair, or, if they can afford it, even of human hair.

6. Concentrations: The Mongols of Sinkiang are badly split up and unevenly distributed in widely separated sections of the province. The largest concentrations are in the Ili, Tarbagatai and Altai Regions. Another large group is found in the highlands of the Qara Shahr Region and a few along the northeastern section of the frontier between Sinkiang and the Mongolian People's Republic. The area most clearly dominated by the Mongols is in the extreme northern part of the Altai Region, along the western end of the frontier with the Mongolian People's Republic. Yet the Mongols in this region constitute only a small fraction of the total number in the province, while the areas in which they are most heavily concentrated, such as the Tarbagatai and Ili regions, are in turn dominated by Uighurs, or Kazakhs.

The geographic fragmentation of the Mongols in Sinkiang is explained by their history. They are divided into three major tribal groups. The first tribal group is the Western Mongols, who include the Olots, Torguts and

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Khoshots; the second is the Chahar Mongols; and the third the Urianghai. The political units, however, do not correspond with these tribal divisions. The Mongols of Sinkiang are administratively organized into three leagues and two special groups. The Unen Susuktu League is made up of ten banners of Torguts who are widely distributed and separated from each other by non-Mongol peoples. The most important Torgut group is in the Tien Shan above the oasis of Qara Shahr. Others are on the northern skirts of the Tien Shan, in the vicinity of Wusu, and others on the southern slopes of the Altai Mountains. The Bato Setkhiltu League is composed of three banners of Khoshots on the Yulduz Plateau, in the heart of the center of the Tien Shan. The Ching Setkhiltu League includes three banners of Khoshots and seven of Urianghai, all located in the Tarbagatai and Altai Regions with an especially large concentration in the vicinity of Burchun (Puerhtsin). The two groups which are not included in the aforementioned leagues are the Chahars, who live in the Borotala Valley, between Kuldja and Chuguchak, and the Olots, sometimes also known as Kalmuks, who live in the Tekes and Kash Rivers in the Ili Region. These complications of the "league and banner" system illustrate how effective it was as a Manchu-invented administrative device for weakening political unity among the Mongols in Sinkiang.

7. Dwellings: The Mongols, like the Kirghiz and Kazakhs, live in felt yurts all the year around. For a detailed description of a yurt

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As one enters through the door of a Mongol yurt, which always faces the sheltered side, directly in front is "the high side"; for here the earth is raised. To the right is the altar of Buddha, placed in a recess, next to which is the place where guests may be seated. Farther to the right are the animal's quarters where cattle and lambs are kept. To the left is the bed of the master of the family, hidden from view by a screen, beyond this is the kitchen. All the processes of life are thus gathered together in one dwelling, humans and animals mingling. Only in the very wealthiest families is there any separation of cattle and men. If at an encampment you find separate tents for cows and sheep, for kitchen and for womenfolk, you know at once that there is great prosperity.

8. Eating Habits: The diet of the nomadic Mongols consists of approximately 50% milk, 30% meat and 20% cereal. Their day starts with the entire family drinking tea, with salt and milk, and eating bread pastries, which are made of flour and sour milk. The noon meal, in most instances is identical. The evening meal is eaten around an open fire and usually includes excellent noodle soup. Beef and mutton, their favorite meat, are added to the diet at such seasons as they are plentiful, but the herds are very carefully husbanded and no animal is killed unless it can be replaced. A plentiful supply of milk is of the utmost importance and is worked up into many forms, all very good and exceptionally nutritious. They use milk to make cream cakes, cream wafers (thin sheets of biscuit), butter, cheese and cream wine (called kumis). For the fastidious, however, these milk products would present a terrific trial, so filled are they with hair and sundry other debris.

9. Occupations: The Mongols of Sinkiang are pastoral nomads, they raise cattle, sheep and horses for their livelihood and at times become amazingly rich. Despite their constant movement in seeking new pastures, the rhythm of their lives is regular and though local changes may alter their migrations, broadly speaking their mode of life shows no change. In winter they establish their encampments in sheltered spots on the south side of a mountain so as to escape the cold weather. They call their winter encampments tung-wo (winter nests). In the summer when burning winds scorch the plains, they dwell on the high plateaus in order to get cool and take to what they call hsia-wo (summer nests). Their winter and summer encampments are carefully chosen and these considerations dominate their lives. The average day for a Mongol family starts before dawn. After a light breakfast, the elder of the family allots to each member a task for that day. After the noon meal and a short rest work is resumed until twilight, at which hour the cattle are driven in from the pasture for the women to milk them. The evening meal is eaten around a fire, no candles are ever lighted, and as soon as the embers cease to glow the family retires for the night.

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10. Customs:

a. General: The first duty of a Mongol woman on rising is to open the window of the yurt; the next to pour water into the great jar for heating, after which it is poured into the washing-pot. When this is ready the dwellers in the tents are roused and in turn pour the hot water over their heads. They use no basin, for they consider it sinful and dangerous to let the same water touch their body twice, in which they resemble Mohammedans. By the time that this ceremony of ablution is completed the women have made tea. A cup is first served to the Buddha, after which all partake freely. It is considered very important to keep the hands clean, so they are wiped on the clothes. The dirtier their greasy robes become the prouder they are, for the stains on their chests denote prosperity, that is, much eating.

The Mongols are a healthy people on the whole, but smallpox is frequent among them. A child who has survived this illness is called a "ripe man", one who has not yet had it is called "raw". Only a "ripe man" can be recommended for marriage, which gives some idea of the extent to which smallpox is common. Their understanding of medicine is slight and it is to their priest that they turn in case of illness. If a reading from the Buddhist scriptures does not improve the patient's condition certain drugs are administered and if these fail the ear of the sick man is pierced by a gold wire on which is hung a piece of coral. They have great faith in this treatment and it is a saying among them that the child with a coral earring is much blessed.

Hospitality is princely on the great plains. No sooner is the sound of hoof-beats heard than the head of the Mongol family hurries from the tent to greet the traveller. He takes the rein of the horse, while the other members of the household line up in sign of welcome, the women to the east, the men to the west. The screen door is raised and the guest is invited to enter and sit beside the altar. Tea with milk and salt is then offered to the visitor, followed by sour-milk cakes. If the guest is to spend the night, orders are given that a sheep be brought to the tent for slaughter. It is always shown to the guest before being killed, as proof that good meat is to be given to him and that the animal is young. Kumis is drunk at the meal and any stranger can be sure of unfailing courtesy even though the visit may last several days. In fact, if the weather is bad the traveller is pressed to stay, for ill fortune must fall upon any man who allows a guest to depart in a storm. A noble guest is received with every honor and all the neighbors are invited to greet him and to share in the eating of meat. But if the traveller is a young man it is he who must show respect to his host and this he does by making a circuit of the tent before entering and lays aside his whip before he passes the door. If he is a relative, some small gift is expected of him. A son-in-law usually brings a cooked sheep's head when he pays a call. Before the company sit down to eat, the head and tail of the sheep are presented to the Buddha. This ceremony is never omitted, for to do so would be to court disaster.

In the spring of every year great festivals are held, the community assembling round the Opui, a conical mound of stones shaped like a pagoda, three or four feet high. When the ceremonies are concluded the young men compete in horse races, for which big prizes are awarded. At other seasons the Buddha is carried in procession among the tents, and all kneel to present the gifts. On these days no food must be taken, and only tea passes the lips of young and old. Nor must any animal be killed, a prohibition which extends to the least insect or worm. The fury of heaven will be visited upon any who breakr this law.

b. Marriage: Mongol marriages are arranged by "brokers", who suggest likely matches to both parties and arrange the financial aspects of the affair. As soon as the contract is made the family of the bridegroom present Hata, mutton, and kumis, a cream wine, as a betrothal gift. Hata is either a

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piece of cloth or of silk, according to the wealth of the parties. A piece of silk embossed with an image of Buddha is considered the most noble of offerings. Next, the "broker" takes the bridegroom to the house of his bride and a second piece of Hata is presented, a piece of gum being placed within the roll. This signifies that the marriage will be as binding as though stuck with gum. Further gifts are then made to the bride's family, but these are distributed by them among their relatives and friends to indicate that their daughter's betrothal has been satisfactorily accomplished.

On the wedding day the bride wears a red cap and a red gown, her face being hidden by a veil of thin cloth. The Lamas bless the happy couple, who kneel in token of respect to the elders of her family. Now she is set upon a horse and led to her husband's tents, musicians walking before her and all the onlookers giving cries of joy. At the gateway to the bridegroom's pasture a passage from the Buddhist scriptures is read by a Lama and the couple kneel once more, making obeisance to earth and to heaven, and then to the altar of Buddha within the dwelling. When the bride and bridegroom are seated upon the bed a sister-in-law of the house unbinds their hair and plaits the strands together, which signifies the closeness of the union. After doing reverence to the Buddha the bride must kneel to the kitchen god, and she is then taken by her sister-in-law to change into the dress of a married woman. Her hair is braided in two plaits which hang down upon her breasts. Once more she must salute the kitchen god and then she is led back to her chamber, where from behind a screen she accepts the gifts of the wedding guests, usually pieces of red cloth and sweetmeats or some other delicacy. The whole company now gather for the feast, consuming much kumis and tea. Those who are eloquent, speak words of blessing and then the guests sing and dance. For three days after the wedding all the duties of the bride are performed by her sister-in-law, but after this period she becomes a member of the household and enters upon her daily tasks.

Monogamy is strictly observed among the Mongols, and no man is allowed to take a second wife while the first is still in his house. It is considered disgraceful for a man not to be married and if he and his intended bride are too poor to wed, the elders of the community give what assistance is needed to make the wedding possible.

c. Burial Rites: Death is followed by fire burial. When a rich man dies his body is washed and wrapped in white clothes. Then it is borne to some high place and there, in the presence of a Lama, is committed to the flames. While it burns the priest pronounces a blessing, and the family crowd round to observe how complete is the burning. If all the bones are burned away this is accepted as a sign that the dead man was not guilty of any secret offense and that his body has been received into heaven. The bone ash is mingled with incense and clean earth and from this is made a figure of the dead man, which is buried at a spot chosen by the Lama. A pagoda is always built over the grave.

When a poor man dies these rites are not possible. The corpse is set upon the back of a horse and a company of friends and relatives ride with it far into the desert. It is now laid upon a heap of stones and a small fire is kindled beside it, after which all ride rapidly away, never casting a glance behind them. After three days the place is again visited and if the body has been completely devoured by wild beasts the friends of the dead man rejoice, knowing him to have been pure of heart. If the corpse is found still unconsumed there is great distress and the Lamas are called upon to make intercession for one so stained by sin that even the wild beasts reject his flesh. The priests call upon the beasts and birds of the desert to do their work quickly, crying out that the dead man is less sinful than they think him. Eventually the flesh is consumed and all are at peace. This ceremony is known as "heaven-burial", for the birds

are considered to be the servants of heaven. The tent of the dead man is always considered unlucky by those who knew him. They move elsewhere and none would willingly return to the place. In return for their services the Lamas are rewarded by the goods of the dead man being shared among them. [redacted] 25X1

A son mourns one hundred days for his parents and a wife the same length of time for her husband. For others the period is forty-nine days, during which there must be no feasting, no wearing of bright colors, and no dressing of the hair. On the anniversary of a parent's death the son burns an oil-lamp in front of the Buddha, incense is urned and friends are invited to partake of wine. If there is a pagoda the sons and grandsons invite Lamas to perform their ceremonies there but if there has been "heaven-burial" the service is held in the son's tent and while the scripture is read he cries towards the sky. There is no compulsion for a widow to remarry, but she often does so. Inheritance is simple and if there is no son a nephew or any male of near kinship is adopted by the family, but no one of another blood is ever accepted.

11. Good Qualities: The Mongols of Sinkiang are not only a very hospitable people, but are also carefree and if opportunity presents itself, scholarly. It is not unusual for prosperous Mongol families, in Sinkiang, to send their children to the coast of China, or even to Europe, for an education. A Mongol princess of Tihwa, for example, has studied English in Peiping, French and medicine at Brussels and in addition speaks Russian as well as her native tongue.

She, and other Mongol intelligentsia, are alert and modest enough to admit that out of the creativeness of the Occident new light is being shed on how man might best live. But they also feel that from their history, customs and people, the Occident too has a great deal to learn.

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13. Summary: In their economic life the Mongols of Sinkiang closely resemble the Kazakhs of Sinkiang. In their social organization, the hereditary Princes of the Mongols enjoy a much stronger and much more institutionalized feudal power than the sultans of the Kazakh tribes. One result of this difference is that poor Mongols are much poorer than poor Kazakhs. [redacted] 25X1 25X1

As to their future, while they are not unintelligent and show excellent sense in the management of their own affairs, they have no use for any progress. Their simple customs having remained unaltered for many hundred years. They are not hostile to progress, but are completely unmoved by it. They preferred to die rather than to submit to the first reforms which the Soviets sought to thrust upon them. Pasture is thus far plentiful and the nomad, if left alone, may play a useful part in the economy of Central Asia, for he has knowledge and skill which the scientific agriculturist does not possess.

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